

I CLAIM:

1. A method of package storage and retrieval comprising the steps of:

a) providing within a retail outlet a receptacle with a compartment capable of receiving, retaining and releasing at least one package deposited by a sender for pick-up by a recipient thereby beginning a transaction;

b) providing to the sender access to a compartment to deposit a pre-ordered package within the receptacle for a recipient; and

c) providing to the recipient access to the compartment to retrieve the package and thereby completing a transaction such that the compartment may be used for another transaction.

2. The method according to claim 1 wherein the compartment has a locking mechanism and access to unlock the locking mechanism during the transaction is provided first to the sender and then to the recipient.

3. The method according to claim 1 further comprising the step of monitoring the transaction from a remote site.

4. The method according to claim 1 further comprising the step of determining, by a sensor in a compartment, whether or not a package is present in a compartment.

5. The method according to claim 4 further comprising the step of notifying the recipient when a package for that recipient has been deposited within the compartment.

6. The method according to claim 5 further comprising the step of notifying the sender when a package has been retrieved by a recipient.

7. The method according to claim 6 wherein the step of notifying the sender is provided through a computer network or other communications medium.

8. The method according to claim 6 further comprising the step of notifying an administrator when a package has been deposited or retrieved.

9. The method according to claim 1 further comprising the step of providing to the recipient access to remote assistance.

10. The method according to claim 9 wherein such remote assistance is provided by one from the group of a telephone, a terminal associated with the receptacle, and a live video connection between the recipient or sender and an administrator.

11. The method according to claim 1 further comprising the step of providing a predetermined window of time in which the recipient may access the compartment for package retrieval.

12. The method according to claim 1 wherein the recipient is a customer retrieving a pre-ordered package and further including the step of acquiring customer information before or during the transaction and using such information to provide direct marketing to the customer before, during or after the transaction.

13. The method according to claim 12 wherein the step of marketing is comprised of any from the group of providing marketing messages to the customer at the time of package pick-up and providing in-store coupons at the time of package pick-up.

14. The method according to claim 13 wherein the step of providing marketing messages to the customer at the time of package pick-up is comprised of one from the group of providing video advertising, audio advertising, printing out in-store credits and printing out promotions.

15. The method according to claim 1 further comprising the step of providing to the recipient access to a compartment after the transaction to return a package to the sender.

16. The method according to claim 15 further comprising the step of allowing package senders who are consumers to deposit a package in a receptacle and simultaneously receive marketing messages as if a recipient.

17. The method according to claim 14 further comprising the step of providing access to the sender after the transaction is completed to receive a returned package.

18. The method according to claim 1 wherein the step of providing access to the recipient comprises providing to the recipient one from the group of a claim check, access code, bar code, or other code unique to that recipient and transaction.

19. The method according to claim 18 wherein the recipient is a

customer retrieving a pre-ordered package and the step of providing access to the recipient comprises extracting identification information from the recipient's credit card to confirm the recipient identity.

20. The method according to claim 19 wherein the step of providing access further comprises using the customer's credit card for payment for the package.

21. The method according to claim 1 wherein the sender is a seller of the package and the recipient is a customer purchasing the package.

22. The method according to claim 1 wherein the sender is any party wishing to send a package and the recipient is any party to whom the package is being sent.

23. The method according to claim 1 wherein a central administrator monitors the activity of the compartments in each receptacle.

24. The method according to claim 1 further comprising the step of locating the receptacle outside of a retail outlet.